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Alternative ideas to reward and punishment in children education

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When dealing disciplinary methods that are used with our children, the first thing we should think of is which our goal is when correcting them. Do we want them to be obedient, compliant and that he "behaves well"...? Or is it our aim that they become a person guided by principles and responsible for their actions?

In previous articles (*quotes*) we have noticed that education's goal is that a *child becomes a person with self-control, self-esteem and with values which serve as basis for their decisions and actions*. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to *satisfy the three basic psychological needs* (love and be loved, trust yourself, understand what life is). This is achieved by means of an education style based on two fundamental aspects: *the child's high appraisal in every moment and guidelines and orders adapted to age and circumstances*, in a familiar environment in which affection is predominant.

To satisfy the third psychological need, it is necessary to guide your children and teach them rules and limits which will be initially learnt thanks to the adults' continuous effort. When children grow up, these will be kept or changed and in that moment they will become principles, which freely selected, will be a guide in which their attitudes are based on. Guidelines and orders are used so that a child *learns and accepts the rules established by adults for them to understand and adapt to the world*.

To know what rules are, how they are established and how they are used, the following video is recommended: Rules, limits and social harmony. Parents education. <http://pedagogiaparapadres.blogspot.com.es> [11].

When rules are established, we must teach them to our children and they do not always follow them. What can we do?

Most parents have been brought up with the **reward and punishment** method. This is efficient to get the child obey and behave well, but it has many disadvantages: it makes parents responsible for their children's behaviour, it prevents children from making their own decisions, it suggests that acceptable behaviour can only be expected

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when parents are present and it can provoke rejection in some children and compliance in others and this can perpetuate in adulthood.

An alternative idea is to use **natural and functional consequences**. This method has the following advantages: children are responsible for their behaviour and this allow them to make their own decisions, they can learn the order or natural or social events, instead of making them meet other people's desire.

Natural consequences: every action provokes an environmental change. That change is called consequences. Natural consequences are those which are directly related to behaviour. Touching the oven when it is hot has the natural consequence of burning your fingers. Games' natural consequence is having fun.

Functional consequences: they occur without parents' intervention; children learn directly from them. Functional consequences must be carefully foreseen and applied by parents since they are not the natural outcome of what is done. If we want children to learn to collect their things, we cannot use natural consequences because this action does not imply any satisfaction. Because of this, we will use compliments and reinforcement and we will help them the first times. This will no longer be needed when the habit is established in children.

Method practice

1. Analyse the situation. Write the situation produced, the way in which our child reacts and the consequences, those which can be noticed and those that do not occur. Be careful not to confuse "response" with "consequences".
2. Challenges rules or principles. Key question: Which consequences fit better to my principles? Take the child age (can he do it?) and parents' coherence (are they exemplary?) into account
3. Exercise the consequences. Design a strategy that contributes to the establishment of a functional consequence. Functional consequences can be a compliment, an approval, smiles, caresses. There are some reinforcement sentences we can use: "Congratulations!", "If you need anything, I will help you", "Well done, you managed to do it".

Practical example: María, a 12-year-old girl, has an untidy room. She is responsible and she is a good student. Parents decide to use the consequences method.

1. They analyse the situation: She leaves quickly in the morning (situation); her parents tell her to tidy things up but she lacks time (response) and the room remains untidy (consequence). When she comes back from school, parents ask her to tidy her room up (situation), the girl does not do it (response) and the room remains untidy (consequence).
2. They challenge their principles: If María is responsible with her studies, should we ask her to be so with her housework as well? Parents decide that being responsible with studies is not incompatible with housework responsibility.
3. They exercise the consequences. If, before doing the homework, María tidies her room up, her motivation to do homework will make her start quickly. Doing the homework would become a consequence of having tidied her room up.

Manners are important!

As María's parents know that they respond better to what they ask for when they speak calmly with her, they try to convince her to accept what is suggested.

? María, we are proud of the way that you assume your responsibilities at high school, but do you understand that it is also important for you to tidy your room up?

? It is not that I do not want to do it, mum, but I have plenty of things to do and I lack time.

? I know, Honey, but dad and me believe that if you organize yourself better, you can have time.

? Well, what if I forget to do so?

? What about leaving your schoolbag in the living room when you arrive home? Will it be easier for you to remember that you need to “tidy your things” before studying? Should I help you for the first week?

? OK, let's try.

Recommended bibliography

Sánchez, P; López, E; Hijano, Y. **Padres consecuentes, hijos felices. Cómo educar con el método de las consecuencias naturales y funcionales**. 3rd edition. Editorial Toro Mítico, 2007.